

3. Spiritual Gifts for Evangelism and Witnessing (2Q 2012—Evangelism and Witnessing)

Biblical material: 1 Pet. 4:10; John 16:8, 13; 1 Cor. 12:28-31; Acts 2:40-47; 13:4, 5, Eph. 4:11, 12.

Quotes

- Before Pentecost the disciples found it hard to do easy things; after Pentecost they found it easy to do hard things. *A. J. Gordon*
- There is none so poor in the church of Christ who may not impart to us something of value. *John Calvin*
- Real spirituality always has an outcome. *Oswald J. Smith*
- With a perversity as pathetic as it is impoverishing we have become preoccupied today with the sporadic extraordinary and non-universal ministries of the Spirit to the neglect of... the more general ones. *J. I. Packer*
- To be filled with the Spirit is to have the Spirit fulfilling in us all that God intended him to do when he placed him there. *Lewis Sperry Chafer*

Questions

What are the essential spiritual gifts for evangelism? Should we list them in order of perceived importance? Does our list vary from others? How do these gifts work in practice? Can we rely on receiving a gift instead of doing the work? In our system, who gets the credit? Would truth-filled understanding be seen as a top priority spiritual gift?

Bible summary

In 1 Peter 4:10 we are told to use whatever gift we have been given for others. This is a very different perspective than often is prevalent in a discussion of spiritual gifts... It is the Holy Spirit that is the agent active in evangelism, convicting people of their sins, the truth, and their need to come to God the healer (see John 16:8, 13). 1 Cor. 12:28-31 lists out some of the gifts of the Spirit. They are all important in the work of evangelism, but not all are evangelists in the way we define the term. But what *is* the greatest gift in evangelism? The life of the early church is explained in Acts 2:40-47, and it is clear that the Spirit was very active in the lives of the believers (see also Acts 13:4, 5). The gifts of the Spirit are for the building up of the body of Christ (Eph. 4:11, 12).

Comment

What are spiritual gifts *for*? Early in my ministry, I held a number of workshops that were designed to discover your spiritual gifts. The frequent problem we discovered was that many people wanted spiritual gifts for themselves, not for building up the body of Christ. But Scripture is very clear that the gifts of the Spirit are not for our own self-edification, but for the wider community. This is where the subject of evangelism and witnessing comes in.

Some presumed manifestations (like speaking in tongues) can be problematic, since all too often they are used as a “badge of honor.” This is why Paul would rather speak five words with understanding than ten thousand in an unknown tongue. The stress must always be on understanding and interpretation, not the spiritual gift.

This reveals the truth about God who wants things done “decently and in order,” and his desire is to build up the community of faith rather than any individual. As we see what the gifts are intended to do, we gain a much clearer picture of God’s intent.

1 Cor. 12:8, 9 speaks of the spiritual gifts of wisdom and knowledge. Such gifts of the Spirit are not usually the ones most frequently remembered or discussed! Additionally, we tend to think of these as acquired through our own study and experience. Does this mean we should give up reading and studying and just wait for the Spirit to give us these gifts? So which spiritual gift do you most desire to use in evangelism and witnessing?

The primary gift of the Spirit is to lead us into all truth. He is the one who witnesses to the truth. He is the inspiration of the truth as revealed in Scripture. Why this truth-focus? And what has this got to do with evangelism? The answer is that without it we continue to operate according to flawed premises and mistaken assumptions. We do not face reality, we create our own version of it. The gift of the Spirit is a love for truth, whatever the painful cost at times. This must always be true for us in all the evangelistic outreach we do. There must never be any kind of duplicity or “untruth.”

When it comes to the Holy Spirit, he will always affirm what is true, whatever the situation. God is always gracious, to be sure, but he cannot accept any manipulation of the truth, because that leads to distorted lives.

God seeks true believers, not the miracle-awed, the glory-bedazzled, or the forcefully-persuaded. The reason for faith is vitally important. Is it because of the supernatural manifestations, or the compelling personal presence, or the inspiring oratory?

Or is faith true because it is true of itself, even without the very presence of God himself who chooses to remain hidden as he walks beside us on the way?

“What is truth? Truth is something so noble that if God should turn aside from it, I could keep to the truth and let God go,” wrote Meister Eckhart.

Ellen White Comments

We are not to encourage a spirit of enthusiasm that brings zeal for a while but soon fades away, leaving discouragement and depression. We need the Bread of life that comes down from heaven to give life to the soul. Study the Word of God. Do not be controlled by feeling. All who labor in the vineyard of the Lord must learn that feeling is not faith. To be always in a state of elevation is not required. But it is required that we have firm faith in the Word of God as the flesh and blood of Christ. {1MCP 49}

Those who are worked by the Holy Spirit are not led by a feeling of enthusiasm, which soon goes out in darkness. The spell of Christ’s influence is abiding. “Be still and know that I am God.” This is a solemn abiding quietude in God. {5MR 235}

The third, fourth, and fifth chapters of Acts give an account of their witnessing. Those who had rejected and crucified the Saviour expected to find His disciples discouraged, crestfallen, and ready to disown their Lord. With amazement they heard the clear, bold testimony given under the power of the Holy Spirit. The words and works of the disciples represented the words and works of their Teacher; and all who heard them said, They have learned of Jesus, they talk as He talked. "And with great power gave the apostles witness of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus: and great grace was upon them all." {TM 67}

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